Southern Appalachian National Forests

Interpretive Planning for Rural Historic Landscapes

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The USDA Forest Service manages over four million acres in six Southern Appalachian forests. The Cherokee National Forest in Tennessee is typical of these Appalachian forests, where a wide variety of cultural resources are present throughout its 630,000-acre expanse. Many of these resources can be considered "cultural landscapes," and exemplify typical patterns of land use over time in the Southern Appalachians.

Since 1990, national forests in the Southern Region have been developing forest-specific master plans for interpretive services. Interpretive teams of landscape architects, archeologists, recreation specialists, and others in each forest have developed plans that include mission statements, sets of specific goals, and initial inventories of interpretive resources. In addition to this planning approach, a "Cultural Resources Overview" was developed for the Cherokee National Forest, providing a bibliographic base for documenting and assessing Forest cultural resources.[1]

Whether an agency is trying to interpret themes over thousands of acres or just one acre, a systematic process is necessary to determine what and how to reveal cultural landscapes to the public. The following are questions to be considered by cultural resource managers:

1. What landscapes should we, as single agencies and members of umbrella organizations like Southern Appalachian Man and the Biosphere (SAMAB), strive to conserve, and in what condition?
2. Do we allow the public to view fragile cultural resources, or do we keep them secreted away for the protection of the resource?
3. What do we want to interpret to the public? We can be guided by interpretive goals and Appalachian themes/contexts developed on-forest, through SAMAB, and through other multi-agency partnerships to determine which resources best reflect our interpretive goals.
4. How do we plan for, monitor, and mitigate the effects of increased tourism upon those cultural landscapes placed under our curation?
5. How do we sensitively integrate modern additions—visitor circulation, restrooms, parking, directional and interpretive signage—with the least intrusion to the cultural landscape?

Tunnel through Backbone Rock was blasted in the early 1900s for a railroad line between Shady Valley, TN and Damascus, VA. Backbone Rock was one of the Forest's first developed recreation areas, and remains a popular destination for picnickers, campers, fishers, and rock climbers.

Given these issues, it is incumbent that cultural resource managers and land use planners develop and delineate aesthetic design guidelines and tailor them to the individual cultural resources on a case-by-case basis. One possible method for guiding the design of amenities may be the ROS (Recreation Opportunity Spectrum) system, a land management planning system developed by the Forest Service in the early 1980s.[2] This is a system that strives to categorize settings and facilities sought by visitors into a range of seven landscape experiences from primitive to urban. These guidelines can be applied to all levels of site development, but have not yet been used in interpretive planning in the Southern Region.

The following examples of categories of cultural landscapes from the Cherokee National Forest will help introduce the range of resources found on public and private lands throughout the Southern Appalachians.

Old Roads/Water Crossings

The Unicoi Turnpike was a major artery used by the Cherokee Indians and later by Euro-American traders and settlers to travel between South Carolina, North Carolina, and east Tennessee. President Thomas

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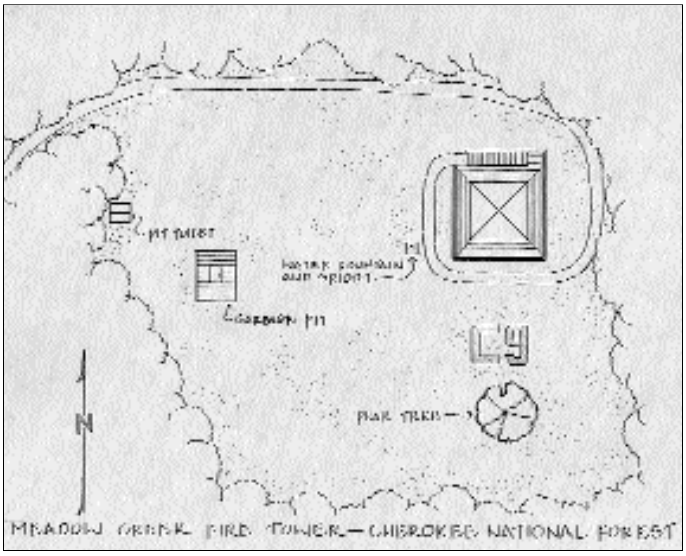
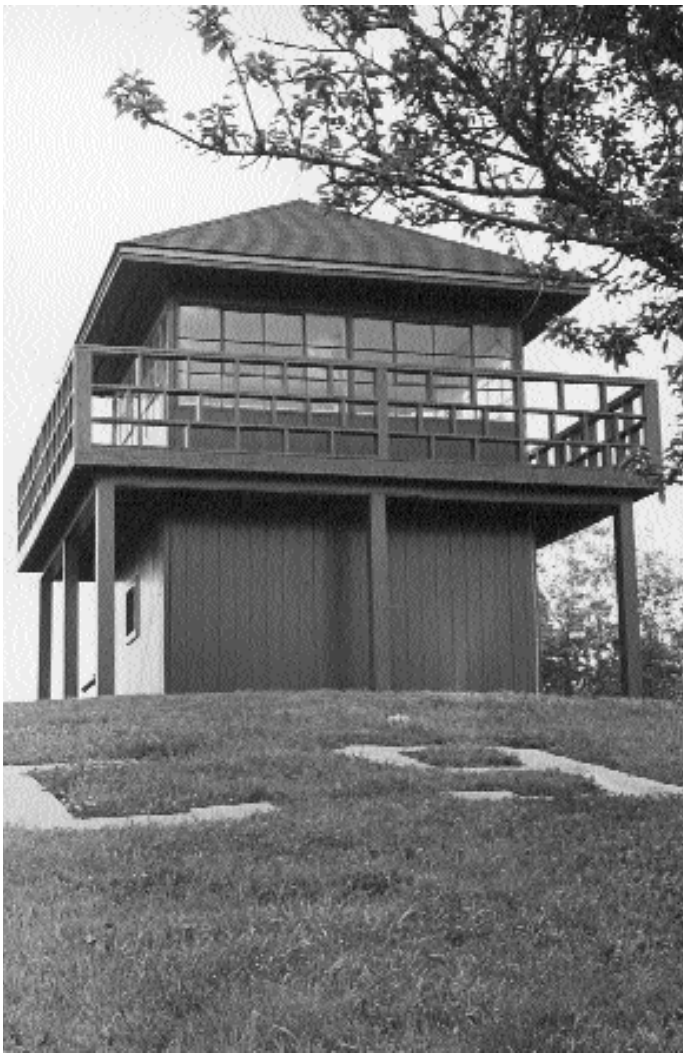


The "C" number (indicating the tower's position in the Cherokee National Forest), "Keiffer" pear tree, and other small-scale elements are part of Meadow Creek's historic landscape. Illustration courtesy of authors.



Meadow Creek Fire Tower has been restored to its 1960s appearance, and will soon see a second life as interpretive site and possible overnight rental. Photo by authors.

Jefferson wrote Tennessee's legislators in 1803 about "…the importance of a road which would enable the inhabitants of Tenissee [sic] and Kentucky to seek a market on the Savannah" and who would have the responsibility to "…negotiate with the Cherokees for permifsion [sic] to the states interested to open the road through their country."[3] A well-preserved (but uninterpreted) two-mile segment of the historic roadway located near the North Carolina border in southeast Tennessee is currently maintained as part of the forest trail system.

The Old Copper Road, on the banks of the Ocoee River and adjacent to the Ocoee Scenic Byway, is another historic road built in the 1850s with Cherokee Indian labor to improve transportation of copper from its source in Copperhill to the railroad in Cleveland, TN, a distance of 35 miles. The last significant segment of the road, four miles long, is currently used to access a popular swimming area called "Blue Hole," so named from the bluish tint cast by copper sediments in the water. The same segment will be the backdrop for development for the Canoe and Kayak Venue of the 1996 Olympic Games. The Cherokee National Forest, Tennessee State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) have signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), accompanied by a plan for the restoration and maintenance of the Old Copper Road as a historic trail after the Olympics.

With portions of nine rivers and innumerable streams running through the lands of the Cherokee National Forest, there are scores of river-fording sites that range widely in historic importance. One well-known ford is located along the Tennessee-North Carolina line that crosses the French Broad River at a place known as Paint Rock. The site has a long history as a culturally-significant locale, evidenced by prehistoric pictographs on Paint Rock, archeological remnants of a blockhouse dating to the 1790s, and remains of structures from subsequent layers of settlement. A similar site is a ford located at the mouth of Little Citico Creek. This point served as an 1819 boundary corner defining Cherokee lands prior to the Cherokee Removal of 1838. The surrounding area is currently being developed into a horse camp and trail system; the old ford will provide a solid-base crossing for horses.

American Indian Sites

A Forest Service cultural landscape that has witnessed a history of human habitation since at least 900 B.C. is the 345-acre tract known as the Jackson Farm. At this site, extensive archeological evidence of prehistoric, early historic, and protohistoric occupations, in addition to a range of Euro-American exploration and settlement patterns, can be studied and interpreted through on-going research. Located on the Nolichucky River between Greeneville and Jonesborough, Tennessee's two oldest towns, the site has excellent potential for tying Native American land use directly to later aspects of Southern Appalachian development.

Upland Grazing

Transhumance, the seasonal movement of livestock to upland pasturage, was a major land-use pattern in the Appalachians. Along the upper elevations of the

Registration station that once graced The Laurels picnic area in Unicoi County, TN. Reconstruction of certain structures and small-scale elements is a consideration during site-specific master planning for rehabilitation of CCC-era recreation areas.

Cherokee National Forest are the remnants of a number of grassy "balds," the product of this upland grazing of cattle and sheep during the 19th and early-20th centuries. Multi-resource inventories and management plans for each of the Cherokee's "balds" are scheduled. Out of these studies will come information on historic boundaries, associated structures, fence patterns, and site-specific historic land-use practices. Plans are now underway for protection and interpretation of a series of these balds along the Overhill Skyway, a newly-designated National Forest Scenic Byway that, when completed, will provide an overmountain connection between Tellico Plains, TN and Robbinsville, NC.

Rock walls along the Appalachian Trail and elsewhere are often associated with upland grazing. A few extant structures, like the log shepherd's cabin on the Appalachian Trail near Shady Valley, TN (now used to shelter hikers), and archeological remnants of other structures attest to this widespread practice.

Farmsteads

The Forest Service is engaged in a major land acquisition program for the protection and relocation of the Appalachian Trail, a national scenic trail. In the process, the Cherokee National Forest has acquired a number of old farmsteads. The Scott-Booher tract near Shady Valley, acquired in the late 1980s, was at one time considered the most complete single rural historic landscape in the Forest. Public access to the site has been limited to only foot travel, over about a half-mile of old road that offers glimpses of the farmstead. The approach road passes a series of fenced areas, all with similar gates: the orchard; the entrance to the house yard; the side yard and various outbuildings; the vegetable garden; and the barnyard / washplace. A number of small scale elements remain, including a hand-hewn clothesline pole and the house spring, surrounded by a stone wall (one of five springs on the site). A 20-tree apple orchard has a number of antique varieties yet to be identified. Through the umbrella of an organization like SAMAB, a comprehensive inventory of historic domesticated plants like fruits, roses, and other ornamentals, as well as small-scale elements used at historic housesites in the Appalachians, could be compiled and made available to researchers of the regional cultural landscape.

The Scott-Booher house, constructed from hemlock logs in the early 1800s, was burned by arsonists in 1991, leading us to rethink preservation and interpretation of remote sites. Should we try to maintain structures that are susceptible to arson and vandalism? With the loss of one or more major architectural features, has the

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integrity of the site been too compromised? Should the fences, gates, and outbuildings be maintained as if the whole unit were still intact? Can the relict landscape itself be interpreted with signage?

Fire Towers

Fire detection and its architecture is a part of Forest Service heritage. Towers in the Cherokee National Forest were constructed between 1920 and the mid-1940s, a few of these by the Civilian Conservation Corps. For clear identification by aircraft, each tower was labeled with identifying character (approximately 6' long), fashioned from concrete and set flush into the ground. In the Cherokee National Forest, the labels ranged from C-1 to C-18, consecutively arranged from the Virginia-Tennessee border to the forest boundary at the Georgia state line.

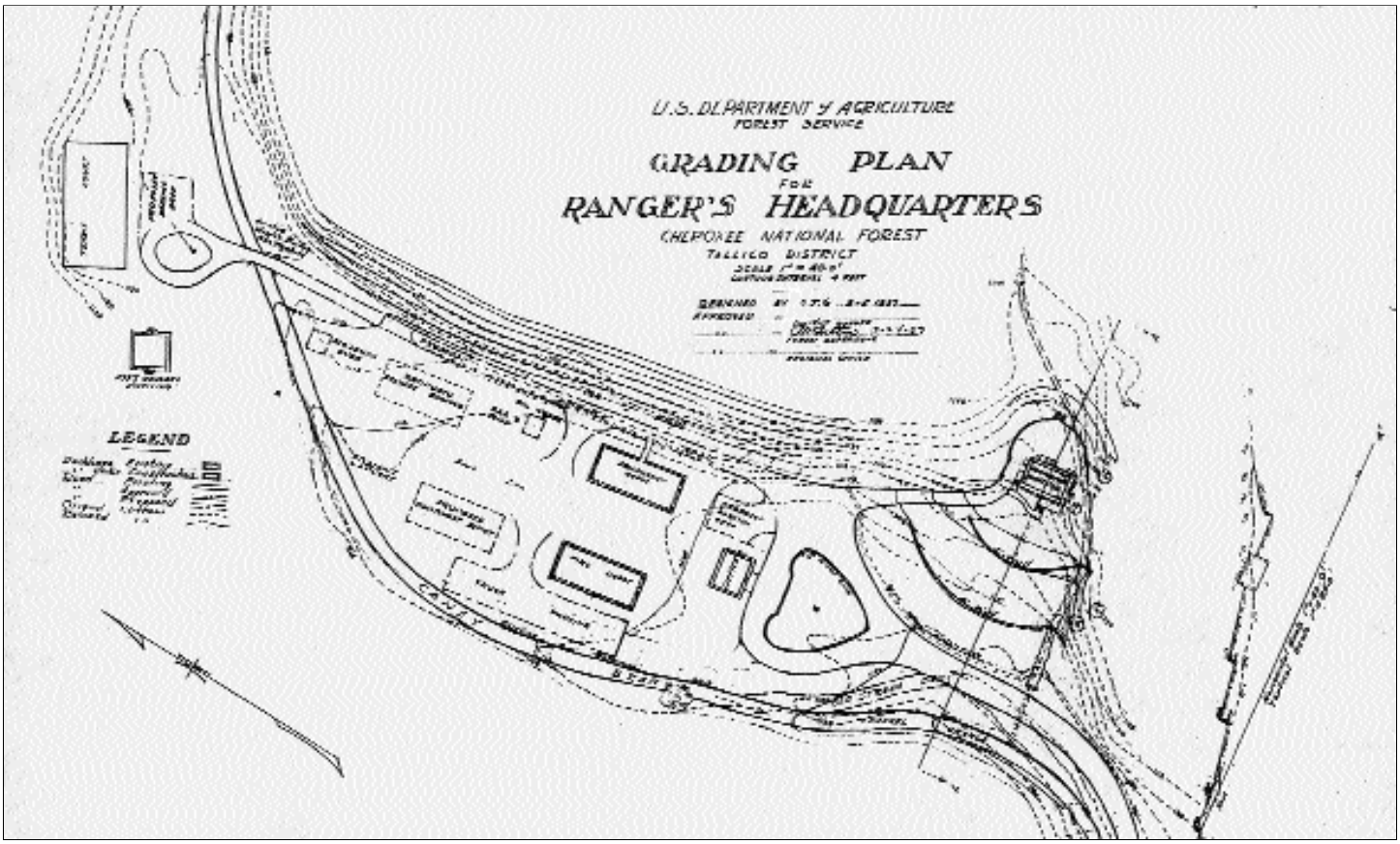
With the advent of all-aerial detection, fire towers have fallen into disuse. Of 18 towers during the 1960s heyday, only seven remain; half of these are occasionally used during spring and fall fire seasons. As funding is available, extant towers and tower sites will be inventoried and documented. With a renewed interest in interpretation, selected sites are targeted to interpret this bygone era of forest management.

The Meadow Creek tower in Cocke County, TN, is one that has been selected for a second life as an interpretive site. Based on interviews, photographs, and other records, the interior, exterior, and grounds have been restored to their 1960s appearance. The structure is one of two of its architectural type in the Forest—a large square building, no more than 20' above ground level, accessed by a stairway, with a wide outdoor deck surrounding the interior windowed viewing-and-living facility. The architectural style better lends itself to public access than towers 50' or more above ground, accessed by narrow ladders or stairs. This structure and others may be available for overnight rental in the near future.[4]

On the other hand, a tall tower such as 90' Oswald Dome, near the Ocoee River, seems dangerous for even fire spotters to climb. If this structure is taken down, it is possible that the cab could be mounted a few feet above ground level, either outdoors or inside a visitor center, to allow Forest visitors to climb through the trap door and operate the "Osborne Fire Finder" inside the diminutive space.

Civilian Conservation Corps

A wide range of CCC-constructed camps and recreation areas, in varying states of preservation and repair dot the lands of the Cherokee National Forest. During the late 1950s and in the decades since, a series of site alterations were made in most Forest recreation areas, some with sensitivity to the original fabric and others not so. Site-specific planning underway in a number of recreation areas Forest-wide will consider elements of



Ranger's Headquarters Grading Plan. Illustration courtesy of authors.

historic designs as well as current considerations for accessibility, etc.

McKamy Lake is one of at least five extant CCC-constructed swimming holes still in existence in the Cherokee National Forest. Located in a campground off the Ocoee Scenic Byway, this is the best preserved and most used of the CCC swimming areas. Heavy-timbered pavilions constructed by CCC labor remain popular sites in a number of picnic grounds; among these are Horse Creek, Backbone Rock, and The Laurels. At the latter, 1937 plans called for retention of "Grove of White Pine and Hemlock (Demi-Virgin)," and old growth trees still contribute to the "feeling" of the site.

The Tellico Ranger Station is located along a scenic corridor a few miles off newly-designated Overhill Skyway. The ranger's office was built for the Forest Service with CCC labor on the site of one of the first CCC camps in the state. Many of the original structures were removed upon closing of the camp. What remains from that era are eight structures, the entrance drive, retaining walls, and other landscape elements.5 To a large degree, these retain integrity in their original fabric and setting. Restoration and adaptive use of some of the historic structures for visitor information, interpretive exhibit space, and offices is underway.

Down the Tellico River Road from the ranger station is the Dam Creek Picnic Area, marked by a "typical" CCC portal. This structure is similar to another CCC portal structure at Pink Beds picnic ground in the Pisgah National Forest. The design and materials of this picnic area are relatively intact. Small scale elements remain—low concrete grills, water fountains, a slate-lined drainage system, and a series of contemplation sites. The designers anticipated heavy site use by constructing flagstone pads underneath each picnic site and bench.

Another type of CCC resource is the abandoned site of a former camp, like Camp Rolling Stone in a remote corner of the Forest near the North Carolina border and the Unicoi Turnpike. At this camp site, enough remains on the ground to determine the arrangement. A swimming pool was fashioned by widening a part of the creek. Extant are the steps to the barracks, chimneys to administrative buildings and mess hall, remains of the latrine, and the camp's protected water source, a spring with a dry-laid stone hood.

These selections are by no means an exhaustive inventory of the Forest's cultural landscapes. They are, however, representative of what can be found throughout the Appalachian forests, along with historic logging sites, caves, railroad beds, mill sites, cemeteries, and a host of other resources.

All of us who are involved with public interpretation are challenged in our task, not only to inventory, document, evaluate, and protect our cultural landscapes, but to plan how to present them to the visiting public in the safest, most informative, most thought-provoking and least intrusive way.

This paper was presented at the NPS- and SAMAB-sponsored Appalachian Cultural Resources Workshop in Asheville, NC, in 1991, and was published by the National Park Service in 1993 in the Proceedings from that workshop.

Notes

1 Theda Perdue and others from the History Department of the University of Kentucky in Lexington produced the "Cultural Resource Overview for the Cherokee National Forest" in 1991. It and other documents referenced in this paper, unless otherwise noted, are available in the Supervisor's Office, Cherokee National Forest, Cleveland, TN.

2 See ROS Book (1986) and ROS illustrative poster #R6-REC-118-94 (1994), USDA Forest Service, Southern Regional Office, Atlanta, GA

3 Letter from Thomas Jefferson to the Senators and Representatives of Tenifsee, 23 February 1803, T.H.S. Ac. No. 130, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN.

4 For more on the history and restoration of Meadow Creek fire tower, see Dyer and Summers' article, "Fire Tower Sees Second Life," in "The National Forests—America's Great Outdoors" (USDA Forest Service, Washington, D.C.), October 1992.

5 Among the structures remaining from 1930s construction are the administrative office, fire depot, two equipment depots, ranger dwelling, oil house, blacksmith shop, and pumphouse.

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